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# Impression Management of Dancers at Dance Auditions

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*Beth Hodus  
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December 2, 1999*



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### **Abstract**

This paper applies Erving Goffman's theory of impression management to dancers in the context of dance auditions. Six dancers were interviewed using qualitative methodology in an attempt to discover how dancers use impression management while at dance auditions. Analysis of the dancers' testimonies proved that dancers did engage in impression management tactics before, during, and immediately following auditions. Dancers were found to use impression management on the choreographers in an attempt to be hired for a particular part or position by changing their appearance, taking on a certain personality, interacting with the choreographers, and hiding imperfections. Analysis also proved that dancers used impression management on one another to prove their self-worth in the competitive atmosphere by showing off and not conversing with one another.

### Literature Review

There comes a time in every dancer's life when he or she must make the choice to either leave the world of dance and resume life as a civilian or to continue one's training in hopes of making a career as a dancer. If the dancer chooses the latter option, then it is inevitable that the individual will have to attend at least one dance audition. Auditions are part of being a dancer (Wolfram, 1994). It acts as the dancer's job interview since it determines whether the dancer will work or starve. As with job interviews, there are always other people who are trying for the same job. With auditions comes an environment of tension and terror (Philip, 1998; Wolfram, 1994). It is up to the dancer to overcome his/her fear and anxiety and dance as flawlessly and expressively as possible at the audition (Philip, 1998; Wolfram, 1994). To do this, one must pretend to be confident and skilled when in reality the dancer is scared and unqualified. An individual's actions are "constructed" in hopes that others will see him in the way that he wants to be seen.

All people have an interest in what people think of them, whether or not they are consciously aware of it. Dancers are no exception. They wear flattering dance clothes that are stylish to look good and be accepted within the dance world. They fix their hair or put on make up before an audition or public performance. And no one gets hired to be a dancer unless they have excellent stage presence. Everyday dancers try to control how other people see them. The "process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions that others form of them" is referred to as impression management theory (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Impression management is a verbal as well as nonverbal expression of how one wants others to see him (Albas & Albas, 1988).

Erving Goffman provides a comprehensive overview of the theory in his book The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life where he uses a dramaturgical approach to examine "the details of individual identity, group relations, the impact of the

environment, and the movement and interactive meaning of information" (Barnhart, 1998). Key to these details is the formation and regulation of impressions. The basic tenets of this theory will be examined, as well as its implications for use in research. After looking at the dance audition process, it will be clear that the theory of impression management can be applied to a dancer's participation in an audition. Questions leading to further study of how dancers use impression management at auditions and how they might use it to create impressions upon the choreographer will be considered.

### **Impression Management Theory**

The theory of impression management has a broad scope and has been the subject of research in numerous academic and non-academic fields. Social psychologists have studied impression management (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980), as well as communication scholars in interpersonal processes of self-promotion (Rudman, 1998), attribution (Crittenden & Bae, 1994), and conflict management (Futrell, 1999). It is used in the everyday world of work (Gardner, 1992; Knouse, 1989) by both managers (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1991) and employees (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). The use of impression management has been seen in the healthcare profession (Merrill & Lorimore, 1998), substance abuse users (Sharp & Getz, 1996), and world-class leaders (Gardner & Cleavenger, 1998). Studies in cultural adaptation (Montagiani & Giacalone, 1998), overcoming discrimination and stereotypes (Halbert, 1997; Rudman, 1998), and social value orientation (Iedema & Poppe, 1994) have noted that impression management theory is used in these situations. Both quantitative (Montagiani & Giacalone, 1998; Mulvey, Bowes-Sperry, & Klein, 1998; Rudman, 1998) and qualitative studies (Albas & Albas, 1988; Futrell, 1999; Halbert, 1997) have used the theory as a basis for evaluation.

The theory of impression management falls into the category of symbolic interactionism (Barnhart, 1998). In this perspective, communication and meaning are

socially created and sustained by interaction in the social group which, in turn, define the reality of a particular situation (Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). That experience is shaped by meanings that are created during interaction (Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Felson (1981) supports the notion that impression management theory's assumptions are consistent with that of symbolic interactionism. Impression management, like symbolic interactionism, assumes that people form responses based on the situations they are in, reality is symbolic, people assume roles that are dependent on the situation, and how the situation will unfold is unknown to its participants (Felson, 1981, p. 184).

Impression management theory discusses the ways in which people use "self-presentational strategies to avoid social disapproval by disassociating themselves from negative actions and outcomes and to gain social approval by associating themselves with positive ones" (Iedema & Poppe, 1994). Impression management can be seen as an individual or group's attempt influence the way others see them through controlled action, speech, and appearance (Riordan, Gross, & Maloney, 1994; Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1994). An "impression" is "an effect produced on the mind" (Ehrlich, Flexner, Carruth, & Hawkins, 1980). In impression management theory, this "effect" allows others to ascribe attributes to an individual as well as categorize him (Goffman, 1959). Impressions are the information about an individual which is acquired by others which in turn enables them to define a situation because they know what to expect from the individual (Goffman, 1959). It is important then, for an individual to know what others think of him and be able to exert some control over this. Impressions are presented and created during a performance.

Impression management theory employs a dramaturgical approach to interaction, relying on a theatrical metaphor and use narrative to describe the process in which an individual interacts with others in a manner that will create a certain impression upon others (Goffman, 1959, p. xi, 254). Through a "performance," an



individual is able to change or create, as well as maintain impressions. It is analogous with interaction (Barnhart, 1998), for both the performer and audience are communicating with one another. Goffman (1959) defines performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (p. 15). The given participant is the "actor" or "performer," a person who constructs impressions to be performed in a staged performance (Goffman, 1959, p. 252). Goffman (1959) refers to the other participants as the "audience," for they are not giving the performance, but simply observing it.

The performance is ongoing, regardless of whether or not the performer is consciously aware of it (Barnhart, 1998). Albas and Albas (1988) refer to these unintended aspects of the performance as "impressions given off," whereas those that were staged as part of the performance can be thought of as "impressions given" (p. 289). A performer can become so "taken" by his act, that he is unaware that he is performing because his staged definition of reality becomes the performer's "real reality" (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). Audiences see this as a "real" performance since it appears to them that the performance was not deliberately put together, but an "unintentional product of the individual's unselfconscious response to the facts in his situation" (Goffman, 1959, p. 70). On the other hand, a performer may also not believe his own performance and therefore act for his audience as a "means to an end," having no concern with their beliefs (Goffman, 1959, p. 18). The audience sees this as a false or "contrived" performance for it seems obvious that false items are "painstakingly pasted together" for the purpose of establishing a certain impression (Goffman, 1959, p. 70). A "real" performance will be more likely to foster the desired impression than one that is seen as dishonest. However, what the audiences consider to be "real" performances are most often pre-planned by the actor. "Misrepresentation" occurs when the audience is "duped" and the performer does not honestly represent himself (Goffman, 1959, p. 58). Goffman (1959) remarks that this deceiving of the audience

takes on the form of "white lies" (p. 63). He also notes that in almost all performances, there is an aspect that can not be openly presented before the audience because of the status quo or the potential for unmeant gestures (p. 64-66).

The reality that the performer creates is referred to by Goffman (1959) as the "front" (p. 22). It is "expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly during his performance" (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). It helps the audience to define the situation, for the front functions the same way each time a performance is given (Goffman, 1959). The front helps to create and manage impressions because it allows the audience "to understand the individual on the basis of projected character traits that have normative meanings" (Barnhart, 1998). The performer can control how he projects these standardized traits. The front includes a "setting" or the "scenic parts of expressive equipment" that include props and scenery and do not move throughout the performance (Goffman, 1959, p. 22-23). "Appearance" and "manner" make up one's personal front. A "personal front" refers to distinguishing items such as clothing, age, and physical characteristics which are marked as traits of the performer himself and expected to be taken wherever he goes (Goffman, 1959, p. 23-4). "Appearance" can indicate the performer's social status, what he is doing at the moment (i.e. working or riding a bike), or where he is at in his life span (Goffman, 1959, p. 24). Goffman (1959) describes "manner" as "the stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" (p. 24). An example could be when a performer exerts a "haughty, aggressive manner" (Goffman, 1959, p. 24). Judging from his manner, the impression is given that the performer expects to be the first to speak and then take charge of the situation (Goffman, 1959, p. 24). The audience expects there to be a certain amount of consistency between the setting, appearance, and manner so that an impression about the performer can be created (Goffman, 1959, p. 25). The front is therefore a "collective representation" as it

gives rise to impressions and expectations of the performer which he in turn must maintain through the consistency of setting, appearance, and manner.

The performer helps to maintain the front through "dramatic realization," in which the performer acts in such a way that will agree with what he is trying to say (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). The performer may have to act to fill a certain status, such as that of an attentive pupil, and this front must be acted out appropriately so that the audience will be convinced of the impression that the performer is trying to maintain (Barnhart, 1998; Goffman, 1959, p. 34). The performer tries to present the front in an "idealized" version to help make his act convincing (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) explains that "when an individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than his behavior as a whole" (p. 35). Social mobility is given as example of how idealized fronts are used in creating convincing impressions (Goffman, 1959, p. 96). To move upward on the social scale, proper performances are given and sacrifices made to maintain the front are made (Goffman, 1959, p. 36). Once acquired, norms associated with material wealth help to keep the front in place so that high social status will be maintained (Goffman, 1959, p. 36). Action inconsistent with the norms will have to be concealed or not done during a performance in order to express idealization (Goffman, 1959, p. 41). Inappropriate actions can range from "secret consumption" of deviant goods to creating the performance by illegal means (Goffman, 1959, p. 42-44). Goffman (1963) notes in Stigma that disreputable and discreditable people must constantly conceal the fact that they are discreditable so that will be less tension and more successful interaction with the audience during performance. Impression management and the presentation of an idealized front extremely important for deviants as their "stigma," or bodily signs, are ones that do not follow the norm. "Mystification" is the term used for displaying certain, idealized characteristics while hiding other, more deviant ones (Goffman, 1959, p. 67). For Goffman (1959), this includes regulating the

information that the audiences may acquire during a performance and regulating the contact which the performer has with his audience (p. 67). Keeping a social distance is an important part of mystification, for then that audience will be more respectful and awed towards what they do not know (Goffman, 1959, p.69-70).

At times the "sign-accepting tendency" that the performer uses to create desired impressions can backfire and an unintended or undesired impression may be born instead (Goffman, 1959, p. 51). A "performance disruption" occurs and a cue may be misunderstood or a gesture may be taken the wrong way which can lead to embarrassment or resentment (Goffman, 1959, p.208). An "unmeant gesture" or a "faux pas" may also be the cause of this embarrassment or resentment (Goffman, 1959, p. 208-9). An unmeant gesture occurs when an "inadvertent act" happens onstage during a performance (Goffman, 1959, p. 208). When an offensive comment is inadvertently made, a faux pas is committed (Goffman, 1959, p. 209). In any case, a performer must take care in "maintaining expressive control" of his performance, making sure that no events in the performance "will occur in such a way as to convey either no impression or an impression that is compatible and consistent with the over-all definition of the situation that is being fostered (Goffman, 1959, p. 51). If expressive control is not maintained and flaws occur in the performance, the audience will doubt the nature of the reality that is being placed before them and will assume that the performance is a false one (Goffman, 1959, p. 51). "Protective practices" are also used to save the show if an unmeant gesture or faux pas should occur (Goffman, 1959, p. 229). These defensive techniques are usually planned in advance should something go wrong (Goffman, 1959).

"Teams," or "sets of individuals who so-operate in staging a single performance," are also used by Goffman to analyze social interaction (Goffman, 1959, p. 79). Goffman (1959) feels that teams contribute a great deal to impression management theory because often one's performance may be a part of a "projection that is fostered

and sustained by the intimate co-operation of more than one participant" (p. 77). An individual will employ a particular front because of the meaning it gives to a broader scope (Goffman, 1959, p. 76). This front must be maintained so that the impression of the team will be sustained. Another characteristic of teams is that its members are not required to maintain their stage characters in front of one another (Goffman, 1959, p. 82). Goffman (1959) refers to this as being "in the know" because one's front cannot be maintained in front of his teammates who know the "real" individual. The "real" individual is protected by "familiarity." This is a formal relationship which Goffman (1959) describes as being "automatically extended and received as soon as the individual takes a place on the team" and has "little warmth" (p. 83). Furthermore, individuals can be members of more than one team depending on his/her interests and place in society (Goffman, 1959).

An individual may not be a team member, but a "colleague" (Goffman, 1959, p. 160). Goffman describes colleagues as "persons who present the same routine to the same kind of audience but who do not participate together, as teammates do" (1959, p. 160). Because they stage the same type of performance, colleagues speak "the same social language" and understand one another's trials and tribulations (Goffman, 1959, p. 160). Usually colleagues are not held responsible for how the other colleagues conduct themselves (Goffman, 1959, p. 166). Goffman notes the exception of when there is a colleague group "of a more corporate character, whose members are so closely identified in the eyes of other people that the good reputation of one practitioner depends on the good conduct of the others" (1959, p. 166). If one person does something deemed as disrespectful, then all colleagues' reputations will be damaged. Goffman refers to this type of colleagueship as "a kind of team," but a "team that differs from ordinary teams in that the members of its audience are not in immediate face-to-face contact with one another" (1959, p. 166).

No matter what kind of team a performer is on, the relationships between team members are interdependent. Every member of the team has the ability to "give the show away" or disturb it by deviant or disreputable actions (Goffman, 1959, p. 82). "Secrets" are often kept to prevent this from happening (Goffman, 1959, p. 141). "Dark secrets" are "facts about a team which it knows and conceals and which are incompatible with the image of self that the team attempts to maintain before its audience" (Goffman, 1959, p. 141). "Strategic secrets" refer to the "intentions and capacities of a team which it conceals from its audience in order to prevent them from adapting effectively to the state of affairs" that will soon be brought out (Goffman, 1959, p. 142). Goffman uses the example of armies designing future war strategies against the enemy to illustrate this concept (1959, p. 142). "Inside secrets" are neither dark nor strategic and can be discovered without negatively affecting performance (Goffman, 1959, p. 142). Another type of secret is an "entrusted secret" in which the performer who knows the secret is bound to keep "because of his relation to the team to which the secret refers" (Goffman, 1959, p. 143). Finally, a "free secret" is another person's secret that can be revealed without "discrediting the image one was presenting of oneself" (Goffman, 1959, p. 143).

A performer must therefore rely on his teammates to function appropriately just as they rely on him to act in accordance to group norms (Goffman, 1959). A norm of reciprocity is thus established, connecting teammates together (Goffman, 1959). When this norm is not followed, public disagreement occurs and the desired impression is lost, for the audiences considers the performance to be false (Goffman, 1959, p. 86-7). Futrell's (1999) study of team impression management and city commissions found that although members of the city commission may not have agreed about an issue during public proceedings, all members backed one another's decisions so that the front of authority was maintained and the impression of an "effective, conscientious, and committed governance" (p. 11). If a member of the team would have spoken out

against the commission's stance on a particular issue, the authoritative front and the impression of effectiveness would have been weakened.

The term "region" is used by Goffman to account for the division between team and individual performance and the audience (Barnhart, 1998). A "region" is defined by Goffman (1959) as "any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception" (p. 106). Regions are bounded and vary "to the degree which they are bounded and according to the media of communication in which the barriers of perception occur" (Goffman, 1959, p. 106). Team members act differently in each region. Regions are divided into "front," "back," and "outside" (Goffman, 1959, p. 107). The "front region" is where the performance takes place. One or more performers are present, as well as the audience. "Accentuated facts" of appearance, manner, and setting appear in this region where the performer is either talking or gesturing to the audience in a manner that is consistent with what the team wants projected (Goffman, 1959). Even when not engaged in a direct exchange with the audience, if a performer can be seen or heard, he is to maintain a front that is consistent with the team's desired impression (Goffman, 1959). It is in the front region that a performer attempts to mold the audience's impression into the desired impression. Goffman (1959) describes the front as being well-adorned, clean, and in good condition (p. 123). Impression management can be seen when before a performer goes into the front region and when he enters the "back region" after performing (Goffman, 1959).

It is in the "back region" where "suppressed facts" stay and the personal front can be dropped (Goffman, 1959). Visibly separated and guarded from the audience, "the impression fostered by the audience is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (Goffman, 1959, p. 112). It is the back region that a team or performer constructs the impression desired to impress upon the audience, hides props, adjusts personal fronts, and practices the performance (Goffman, 1959). The performers may ease performance anxiety and separate themselves from the audience by degrading

them (Goffman, 1959). The back region is also home to “destructive information” which if shown to the front region may disrupt the performance and falsify any attempts at making a desired imprecision (Goffman, 1959). Secrets remain in this area.

In the “outside region” are those who are not members of the team or the audience, nor are they performing. Goffman (1959) sees those in the outside region as individuals for whom the performers will be putting on a show, but it will be one that is different from the one that they are currently enacting. Social establishments such as buildings create the outside region, as they keep the team and audience bound to the performance area (Goffman, 1959). It helps the performer to “segregate” the audience so that individuals may only watch a show that is meant for them (Goffman, 1959). It is through audience segregation that a performer can adjust his/her performance to meet the demands of each audience, therefore making sure that the desired impression will be presented and maintained.

### **Dance Auditions**

Most published information about dance and dancers comes from advice and training manuals (Berardi, 1991; Hamilton, 1998) and biographies (Buckle, 1971; Shelton, 1981). Theoretical works that analyze movement and the nature of dance (Hanna, 1979; McFee, 1992) have also been published. Empirical studies on dance and dancers subjects have been done in areas of education (Purcell, 94), culture (Demas & Triantafyllou, 1997.; J.Scalin, personal communication, October 1998), sociology (Gimore, 1993), and communication (Oseroff-Varnell, 1998). Many books have been written about the lives of dancers (Migel, 1972; Johnston, 1985; Lyle; 1977; Walter, 1978); however, empirical studies tend to be rare and do not often focus on theatrical forms of dance such as ballet, tap, jazz, or modern dance , nor auditions for roles in these genres (Demas & Triantafyllou, 1997; Katula, McAuley; et al, 1998; Ronai, 1998). Perhaps this is because of the active life that many dancers lead and the fact that even in large cities like Los Angeles, there are very few dancers (Gilmore,



1993). It is even harder to locate dancers for research because many of them are not in dance companies, but take class at a university or studio, or have stopped dancing (Gilmore, 1993). Research on theatrical dancers would be more beneficial than biographies, for their results will help those outside the performing arts world to understand performers. Especially absent from the scene are the testimonies of frequently auditioning dancers.

More empirical research needs to be done on dancers, for they have their own language, learning process, memory recall tactics, expectations, and stereotypes that can provide useful information to the academic world, namely in the field of communication. For example, the results of Oseroff-Varnell's (1998) study of the socialization of new high-school age dancers to an already established dance troupe could be compared to the socialization process of newcomers to a public high school. Empirical research would also be beneficial in the area of dancers at dance auditions. There are many "how to" articles and books on the subject (Hamilton, 1998; Horosko, 1999; Nielson, 1984; Philip, 1998; Wolfram, 1994). Unfortunately this literature is written by choreographers and psychologists who have no idea what it actually feels like to be auditioning. The above literature gives an insight into what choreographers like to see from the dancers at auditions, but it would also be both interesting and beneficial to discover the dancer's audition "how tos." Auditions can also be seen as a form of communication because the dancer is sending to the choreographer his/her abilities and personality and the choreographer communicates feedback as to whether or not he/she is interested in the dancer. Choreographer Murray Louis (1984) describes auditions as being "instant statements" made by the dancer (qtd. in Nielson, p. 118). A dancer can do many things to communicate with the choreographer at the audition as later discussion will prove.

In order for a dancer to have a career in the dance field, the dancer must audition. A dance audition can be defined as "usually a public call for performers to be

seen by directors, producers, or choreographers" (Macpherson, 1996). Hamilton (1998) notes that in order to find work in any aspect of the dance world, a dancer has "to get out there" and has "to be seen" (qtd. in Philip, 1998, p. 7). Auditions take place for positions as a choreographer<sup>1</sup>, a company member, or a cast member of a dance production. Simply put, auditions are a part of being a dancer (Wolfram, 1994).

Most auditions follow the same format. An audition is announced as a "call." They can be advertised as an open invitation, or "cattle call," to whoever would like to come, or they can be invitation only (Nielson, 1984). When the dancers arrive, they turn in to the receptionist pictures of themselves and a résumé. Dancers are then asked to sign in and then are given a number to make it easier during the audition for the choreographer to identify and take notes on them (Nielson, 1984). The if the dancer arrives early enough, then he/she can stretch out before the choreographer begins to teach the routine. The choreographer then teaches the routine to all of the dancers present (Nielson, 1984). Often the choreographer will simply watch and have an assistant teach the routine and interact with the dancers (Nielson, 1984; Wolfram, 1994). From there the dancers are asked to step aside and the choreographer has smaller groups dance in order of their numbers, such as numbers 10 through 16 (Nielson, 1984). While the dancers are performing the routine in small groups, the choreographer is "making close observations" to "separate those [the choreographer]really like[s]" (Nielson, 1984). Sometimes the small groups perform the dance a second time, but often they are only given one opportunity to perform (Nielson, 1984). The dancers are then lined up in numerical order and the choreographer selects who he/she is considering for the job (Nielson, 1984). The dancers not selected are considered "cut," or not hired. The audition will then continue as before until the choreographer has cut down to the number of dancers he/she needs.

This format obviously puts tremendous pressure on a dancer to give an extremely high level of performance and to be as flawless as possible. It is no wonder then that in the dance world the word "audition" has a negative connotation. "You're under pressure, no matter what" a ballet dancer tells Philip (1998, p. 7). Dancers associate auditions with fear and anxiety (Philip, 1998; Wolfram, 1994). The audition is also a dancer's job interview so naturally the environment is "pretty tense" because "competition is in the air" (Transcript 4, Line 96). There is also pressure on the dancer to be the type of dancer that the choreographer wants, since the choreographer usually chooses those who fit the role's "type" (Nielson, 1984; Grody & Lister, 1996). They want dancers that have a certain look, depending on the role for hire.

It is natural then, for the dancers at the dance auditions to try and make the best possible impression upon the choreographers in the short amount of time that they will spend together. This has excellent implications for the theory of impression management. Choreographers admit that first impressions at auditions are important (Nielson, 1984). Nielson (1984) reminds audition hopefuls that the "audition often begins the minute you hand your resume to the auditioner" (p. 1). There are a number of tricks that the dancer is told to use at the audition or gain the respect of the choreographer (Nielson, 1984; Philip, 1998; Wolfram, 1994). Mentors advise auditionees on what to wear, what to say to the choreographer, and how to bear the competition (Hamilton, 1996; Nielson, 1984; Philip, 1998; Wolfram, 1994). All of this means that dancers instinctively engage in impression management while at dance auditions.

Indeed, impression management theory would be an ideal theory to use when researching dance and dancers. Most of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical structure is already a standard part of the art form. The "dance" itself is a staged performance that uses actors, or dancers, to create a desired impression (the choreographer's) upon an audience. The performance is given by a team of dancers who act in the same manner

to accomplish a unified team goal. Setting, appearance, and manner are presented, and there are even front and back regions to separate the audience and performers.

Recall that impression management is successful if the performer presents a real performance (Goffman, 1959). Recall also how the performer must highlight the performance with facts supporting the performer's front (Goffman, 1959). Empirical research would show just how these dancers at dance auditions engage in idealization to be the "type" the choreographer wants. It would show how an individual suppresses his/her insecurity while in the presence of others. A careful examination of impression management theory and dancers at dance auditions, a qualitative study, could be designed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do dancers use impression management to prepare for auditions?

Research Question 2: What kind of impression management strategies do dancers use in the presence of other dancers at the auditions?

Research Question 3: What kind of impression management strategies do dancers use in the presence of the choreographers at dance auditions?

Research Question 4: How do dancers use impression management during the "dance" part of the audition?

Research Question 5: Is impression management still being used after the dancer has finished dancing at the audition?

### **Methods**

Data collection for this study used the qualitative method of unstructured interviewing. Qualitative methods of research do not focus on statistics nor attempt to make hypotheses based on data frequency, but instead look at responses and personal experiences, often of which the researcher is directly involved in (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Unstructured interviewing is a "guided conversation

whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee. . . . rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 18). Unlike the quantitative structured interview which focuses on the response frequency to performed answer choices, the qualitative unstructured interview focuses on discovering subject's experiences and interpretation of a topic (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). This type of data collection is ideal for studying impression management as it allows its elements to be revealed authentically and first hand by the subject through his/her experiences and narratives.

The unstructured interview is characterized by a flexible format, meaning that the questions are used as a "guide" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). This guide has a general organization of specific topics that the interviewer wants to be sure to cover. Although the researcher may prepare a few "probes," or directed, questions in order to cover a specific experience or detail, most of the questions asked will stem from previous responses (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). It is the narrative responses of detailed experiences and feelings that the interviewer is searching for.

Six dancers, five female and one male, were chosen to be interviewed for this study. They were chosen based on their extensive experience with dance auditions, both in academic and professional settings. Responses would be reflective of both genders and of a variety of dance genres since all had experience in various dance fields such as ballet, modern, jazz, and musical theater. The interviewees were also chosen because they already had an established rapport with me. Establishing rapport with one's subjects is especially important for obtaining rich data (Gold, 1958; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). If the interviewees are able to trust the interviewer and feel comfortable with him/her, then they will be at ease and eager to reveal information when prompted. Therefore, I knew this pre-established rapport with the six subjects would be to my advantage and allow for the collection of detailed, descriptive data. Another benefit of already knowing the subjects was that I was aware of what their

strengths were and then was able generate questions that focused on them. For example, one of my subjects has auditioned for a number of music videos, concert tours, and pop music commercials, so I asked her many questions about attire, hair, make up, and role play. Another subject is currently in a modern dance company, so the questions I asked her tended to be more focused on ideal types of dancers.

The interviews for the study took place in informal settings on Loyola Marymount's campus away from a dance atmosphere. Before the interview even began, I felt it was important for my research to be taken seriously since my subjects mainly knew me in a studio setting. The theory of impression management was explained along with the goals of the study. Consent to be tape-recorded and to participate in the study was obtained and confidentiality was assured. Questions were then asked. Again, in an unstructured interview, the conversation is not planned to go question by question so I brought a list of topics I wanted to cover along with potential questions, but those questions were not always the ones asked. On many occasions, a response would generate an entire series of questions that were not in the interview guide. Likewise, a potential question was often included in a response to another question. The interviewees were then thanked and the conversation was turned to non-related matters.

Overall, the data collection and interview processes went smoothly with no serious methodological issues. The only thing that was difficult for me was the fact that I had to act naive about dance auditions during the interview because I too am experienced in the dance audition field. Lofland and Lofland (1995) refer to this as "marginality and temptation to convert" (p. 53). During one interview I was ready to jump in with my own opinion since I had gone to the same audition and did not feel the same way my subject did. Fortunately I was able to control my urge in the name of good data collection. This issue never affected my ability to collect data or to evaluate it, but was something that I felt while conducting the research.

The interview was then transcribed. Sections from the transcripts, or “chunks,” of the subjects’ responses were evaluated for elements of impression management. The results of what impression management elements were found is what will follow.

### **Analysis**

It is important for dancers to use impression management during auditions in order increase their chances of being hired for the role. A closer examination of dancers’ practices at auditions will reveal what an integral part of giving one’s best at an audition impression management is. Dancers use impression management before the audition to prepare themselves to fulfill the audition’s expectations. They use impression management with other dancers at the audition to prove their dancing ability and maintain a display of confidence. Impression management is used in presenting the best of oneself to the choreographers and to dance full out<sup>2</sup>. The impression must be maintained throughout the entire audition, hence the use of impression management after the dancer is finished dancing.

#### **Before the audition: Preparation for Success**

In order to make a good impression upon the choreographers, the dancer must do many things beforehand. It is how a dancer prepares prior to the audition that helps to form the initial impression that the choreographer will see. Since first impressions tend to set the audience’s expectations for the quality of the performance (Goffman, 1959), it is important that dancers be prepared to make a favorable one.

Impression management at auditions occurs before the audition and begins away from audition location itself. An examination of how dancers create their fronts in dance technique class<sup>3</sup>, by researching the role for hire, by allowing themselves to become the role, and by making oneself standout, will reveal that what dancers do before auditions is a form of “idealization.” They will go into the audition hoping that they are exactly what the choreographer is looking for (Goffman, 1959; Transcript 4, Lines 64-68). The following narratives will also show that it is necessary to prepare in

these various ways in order to “maintain expressive control” throughout the performance (Goffman, 1959).

**In-class preparation.** In order to make a positive impression on the choreographers, the dancer must be comfortable with his/her dancing ability and body. The desired impression that a dancer wishes to make at the audition begins long before the audition itself (Transcript 5, Lines 8-12 ; Transcript 6, Lines 51-62). A dancer’s training plays an important role in how confident and prepared he/she for the audition. The dancer therefore begins to cultivate how he/she wishes to be perceived by the choreographers in what Goffman (Goffman, 1959) refers to as the outside region. This is an area away from the setting and the audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 135). The following account shows that how dancers use dance classes as their outside region in preparation for auditions:

The best way I think you can do to prepare for an audition is in your technique classes where you work and you dance to the fullest of your ability so when you’re in an audition you know how to access that and you know how to invest it readily enough if you feel confident and comfortable. You need to trust your facility and the only way you can do that is out of repetition and how hard you work before the audition. (Transcript 5, Lines 56-61)

In the outside region, the performance the performer gives is different from that the audience at the audition will see (Goffman, 1959). How the dancer dances in class may be okay for the audience of teachers and fellow students, but not for the audience at an audition. In class the dancer puts on a performance, but it is a performance characterized by learning, experiencing new bodily sensations, and making mistakes. Mistakes do not count against the dancer in class because it is a learning process (Transcript 1, Lines 108-109), but the impression of a struggling student is certainly not what the dancer wishes to convey at an audition. Therefore the dancer uses the outside region of the dance class to perfect the “front.” The dancer will construct to



front into what she/he wishes the audience in the front region of auditions to see (Goffman, 1959). This is why the narrator feels so strongly about working hard in technique class.

At auditions, dancers really only have "one shot" to make their mark upon the choreographers (Transcript 6, Lines 243) and so knowing how to "access" and "invest" one's talents and technique "readily" (Transcript 5, Lines 58, 59) is important. Long-term, outside preparation allows one to do this and helps the dancer to plan strategies to use to perform well at an audition. If the routine at an audition emphasizes flexibility, then the dancers whom have the advantage are those who have worked in their technique classes towards building flexibility. These will be the dancers who are able to pull it out of their repertoire to use at the audition, thereby creating a favorable impression for the choreographer.

Preparation in technique class also helps to solidify the belief in the part the performer is playing, creating a sincere performance (Goffman, 1959). A sincere performance is essential in convincing the audience of the performer's role (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). If a performer is familiar with dance technique and is prepared to perform it, then the dancer will exude the sort of confidence that the choreographer looks for when choosing dancers (Transcript 6, Lines 142-145, 151-153). The choreographer will be convinced that the dancer is a well-trained and hard-working person and hire him/her.

Giving a certain impression at auditions really begins outside of the audition location and long before the audition starts. It begins in dance class where the dancer chooses what role he/she wants the choreographers to see him/her in and works in class to perfect that role so he/she can give a sincere performance at the audition.

**Researching the part.** If given enough notice before an audition, dancers will often do a background check on the role or company they will be auditioning for. This is important because the dancer will be prepared for the type of dancing and attitude

that will be expected at the audition and will be able to easily adapt the front to fit in (Goffman, 1959). This way the dancer can perfect his/her front to give an idealized performance by being able to maintain expressive control during the audition (Goffman, 1959). When asked if prior research on the desired role or company would lead to a successful audition, the informant had this to say:

Yes, whether it's a dance role, acting role, whatever because the more you know about that role the more comfortable you can be when they throw something at you. If you're solid in that role's mindset you'll be on your toes more than other people will. . . . So I do [research] to a certain extent to see what I'm getting myself into and to be prepared for what kind of things they look for or if they do more of the Russian style dance or more of the Americanized ballet and what their style is like. (Transcript 6, Lines 51-53, 59-62)

Whatever information a dancer can obtain about the role or dance company he/she is auditioning for allows the dancer to be "solid in that role's mindset." "Solid in the role's mindset" means that the performer has established the front, or "the role's mindset" and will be offering a real performance because he/she is sincerely convinced of his/her actions, or "solid" (Goffman, 1959). It is important for a dancer to be "solid in the role's mindset" and know what the audience expects of him/her so that the dancer may present the role that the choreographer is looking for.

The impression that dancers want to give at auditions is one of being "on your toes." All dancers strive for this idealization to impress the choreographers so that they will be hired. Therefore, they offer an idealized performance based on "what kind of things they [the choreographers] look for" which are the "official accredited" values and standards of the dance world (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). One way to offer an idealized performance is by being familiar with the role to be cast and the choreographer's "style" prior to the audition.

It is also important for a dancer to be knowledgeable of the desired role or company in case the choreographer happens to "throw something at you." If already convinced of his/her front, the performer will feel "more comfortable" and maintain expressive control of the performance (Goffman, 1959). Maintenance of expressive control is especially important when a performance disruption happens like when a choreographer "throw[s]" a difficult or fast dance phrase or movement to those auditioning. Maintaining one's front during performance disruptions is extremely important, and is especially important to dancers at dance auditions since they strive to have an idealized performance. Being "comfortable" because of one's comfort with the role due to prior research is a way dancers maintain expressive control of their fronts during the audition.

**Becoming the role.** After researching the role before the audition and becoming familiar with its characteristics, dancers will then prepare attire that will give them the appearance of the role when they get into the audition itself (Goffman, 1959). Going to the audition as the role gives the impression that the dancer is seriously interested in the job. Dancers dress and act the part for hire in hopes that they will be the actor that the choreographer wants because they are the idealization of the part (Goffman, 1959). What the choreographer sees is not the dancer, but the character or role. The following narrative describes how dancers go to auditions as the role for hire:

But then at another audition I went to for ballroom dancing, you just had to look nice. Some girls were in hoop skirts, the ones that go way out. I mean stuff that looks [like] they had to go rent and it's just like I don't even know why you would bother to do that. If there's like a certain call or a certain look, people usually go way out, all out. And I guess there have been Cher auditions for her tour. For people that had worked with Cher before know how to dress and you're supposed to wear your underwear pretty much. (Transcript 2, Lines 185-191)

In order to increase their chances of getting hired, dancers "go way out, all out," indicating that they are giving an idealized (Goffman, 1959) performance that meets the ideals and expectations of the choreographer and the dance world. Those dancers who had worked with the music artist Cher knew what the ideal was for that particular audition and therefore dressed in underwear, the ideal, for that particular audition (Transcript 5, Lines 190-191). They were attempting to give a performance based on the social expectations of Cher's tour and were therefore attempting to use idealization to make a favorable impression of the perfect Cher dancer. Going "all out" takes place before the performance in the outside region where the dancers get into "full costume" and arrive at the front region, or audition, already in their fronts (Goffman, 1959; Transcript 2, Lines 193-195).

When dancers actually perform onstage, they do not perform as themselves, but rather as a character. They dance a role that the choreographer or the audience expects from them. Before the audition, the dancers create a front (Goffman, 1959) in accordance with a "certain call or a certain look" that the choreographer desires (Goffman, 1959). Having to look nice indicates that the dancers must construct their appearance to meet this expectation. "Hoop skirts" and "underwear" are props that help a dancer to create the front and give the appearance of the role for hire (Goffman, 1959). The fact that the types of props used is dependent on the audition is an excellent example of impression management since the dancer or actor is constantly constructing and reconstructing him/herself to present a performance that is consistent with the expectations of the audience (Barnhart, 1998).

Before dancers enter the audition, or the front region, it is important that they enter with a front consistent with the desires of the audience, or the choreographer. Creating one's front by going all out through the use of props is important to one's appearance, which is one that the dancer hopes the choreographer, or audience will find this appearance acceptable.

**Preparing to stand out.** In order to be picked for the role at the audition, the dancer must prepare to stand out in some way so that the choreographers will notice him/her out of the large "herd" of dancers (Transcript 1, Lines 93-95; Transcript 5, Lines 278). Most dancers do this through their appearance (Goffman, 1959) since they believe that "that's usually the one they [the choreographers] pick, the one their eyes go" (Transcript 1, Lines 95). A noticeable appearance created through the use of "props" can augment a dancer's dancing ability to make a favorable impression on the choreographers (Goffman, 1959). If the choreographer focuses on a specific dancer with a memorable look, that dancer will most likely be hired since they stood. But the appearance cannot be created at the audition, it must be created ahead of time so that the dancer enters the audition already unique and noticeable. Certain props are also picked out ahead of time and brought to the audition in preparation of misrepresentation (Goffman, 1959) of the role by the dancer. These sections of a narrative describe how one dancer prepares to stand out at the audition:

If it's not a jazz shoe, I'd bring a back up dance shoe. I also bring an alternative outfit in case I get there and stick out like a sore thumb. You want to stick out, but in a good way. You don't want people to be like "Oh, she doesn't belong at this audition". . . . Ya, my hair's usually down which I'm not used to- dancing with my hair down. I usually wear it up [in dance class]. You have to have this big hair, lots of make up. . . . So you try to look striking and so that's another thing I bring is a lot of make up and I also bring clips for my hair in case I have to pull it up, but if I do I try and make it in an interesting way. (Transcript 1, Lines 84-86, 91-93, 95-97)

The use of props such as "jazz shoe," "dance shoe," "outfit," and "clips" can be strategically plotted out before the audition (Goffman, 1959). Note that the narrator in the above passage brings a "back up dance shoe" and an "alternative outfit" with her to auditions. With these reinforcements, she will be prepared for any performance

disruptions like not having the correct style of clothing on (Goffman, 1959). Her appearance (Goffman, 1959) will be consistent with that of the other dancers at the audition and therefore consistent with what the choreographer is looking for. Planning ahead for performance disruptions (Goffman, 1959) such as "sticking out like a sore thumb" will keep the dancer on track in his/her plan to make a favorable impression by allowing him/her to quickly reconstruct his/her appearance. "Alternative outfit" and "back up dance shoe" indicate the dancer foresight to maintain maintenance of expressive control at the audition and avoid a misrepresentation or undesired impression (Goffman, 1959).

Before the audition, dancers know that they need to "stick out" and construct their appearance in such a way that they will do so. The dancer above reveals that she constructs a unique appearance with "big hair, lots of make up." The appearance of "[B]ig hair, lots of make up" will then give her the manner (Goffman, 1959) of being "striking" so that she will "stick out". This appearance is different from how she normally looks since she is "not used to- dancing with [her] hair down," indicating that she has prepared a different front for the audition in order to make a performance "striking". Her change of appearance will therefore create a different manner; one that she hopes the choreographers is looking for.

### **Warm up time- time to check out your competition**

Once a dancer has prepared for the audition, he/she goes to the audition with his/her pre-constructed front (Goffman, 1959). Even though all of the dancers are in the front region, the performance or dancing and auditioning does not happen right away (Goffman, 1959). The dancers are given the opportunity to stretch while the choreographers prepare for the audition and sort through pictures and resumes (Transcript 2, Lines 202-204). However, according to a majority of the dancers interviewed, this "warm up time" is not exactly used for stretching, but for attempting to size up and intimidate one's competition (Transcript 1, Lines 34-35; Transcript 2, Lines

47-53; Transcript 3, Lines 102-103; Transcript 6, Lines 89-96). One dancer describes audition warm ups as "the time when you're supposed to be stretching, but you're not" (Transcript 2, Lines 52-53). What the dancers are really doing is forming impressions of others and trying to present their own "front" to make an impression during the performance of warm up since dancers at auditions tend to be "out for blood" (Goffman, 1959; Transcript 4, Lines 91). Things that dancers use for impression management during the warm up period are their interactions with other dancers, their appearance, imitating other dancers, and showing off.

**Interaction.** Interaction before a dance audition is minimal due to the dancers' attempts to create a competitive environment and to create the impression that they are intimidating and superior in dance ability. The goal is to create the impression of "I'm not going to talk to you because you're my competition" so that the other dancers will be intimidated into respecting that dancer and to not approach him or her because he/she is above everyone else (Transcript 3, Lines 72-73). A lack of interaction, then, is part of the dancer's front that he/she constructs in a way that creates a manner of competitiveness and superiority (Goffman, 1959). It is also a way to maintain expressive control and make sure that no unmeant gestures occur to create an impression of anything less than confident because "maybe on the inside they're still pretty tense about the situation" (Goffman, 1959; Transcript 3, Lines 71-72). The following account shows one dancer's view of interaction at dance auditions:

. . . it's always pretty tense. Just like 'I'm not going to talk to you because you're my competition'. . . . Even though I see the same people, it's not like we're friends or anything. I guess we should say hi to each other, but it's kind of like a known thing. We're always out for the same part so it's like more competitive that way . . . . I mean there's probably those people that will go together and there's always little cliques everywhere, but people tend to stay more quiet I think at the commercial auditions, focusing on themselves and what they need

to do for themselves and stretching and making sure they're warm and checking everybody else out. (Transcript 3, Lines 72-73, 92-95, 99-103)

The dancers at dance auditions are not teammates, but colleagues (Goffman, 1959) who do the same type of performance as indicated by "it's not like we're friends or anything" and "we're out for the same part." The fact that the dancers at auditions are colleagues is important when a dancer is considering what kind of front he/she wishes to create. He/she is aware that everyone will be giving the same type of performance, a dance audition, so the dancer will try to keep his/her interaction with the other colleagues to a minimum so as to create a front and manner of superiority and not reveal any strategic secrets for the other dancers to steal (Goffman, 1959).

The idea of "a known thing" indicates the free secret that dancers do not talk to one another at auditions in an attempt to maintain the idealized front that every dancer wishes to have at auditions (Goffman, 1959). This front can only be maintained through the appearance of staying "more quiet" since the dancers are each other's "competition." The appearances of staying "more quiet" and "focusing on themselves" at auditions creates the manner that dancers are "checking everybody else out." This creates the impression the dancer is competitive and wants the job.

"Focusing on themselves and what they need to do for themselves" indicates that minimal interaction at an audition can also be used by a dancer to maintain expressive control. By "focusing on themselves and what they need to do for themselves," the dancers are able to maintain control of their desired front, allowing to them to keep up their desired impressions. "Focusing on themselves and what they need to do for themselves" also allows dancers to keep in tune with the audition and their dancing so that no unmeant gestures occur during the warm up, creating the impression of an unskilled dancer.

**Appearance.** Dancers judge one another by their physical appearance. Even though dancers dress in the character of the role for hire, there are different extremities



of the dancers' interpretations of how the role should look. Dancers form opinions of one another's personalities and dancing abilities based on what they're wearing. What another dancer wears creates his/her "manner" for the other dancers (Goffman, 1959). The following reveals one dancer's thoughts about how her competition looked at a dance audition for the Laker Girls<sup>4</sup>:

You could tell the returning girls. They all had the same look and looked perfect the whole day. And you could tell the girls who were just huge Laker fans who had no idea how to dance. They had purple and yellow dance stuff on and I'm like "OK?" (Transcript 2, Lines 40-42)

This dancer was able to predict her competition's ability simply by appearance (Goffman, 1959). Dancers that had the "same look and looked perfect the whole day" presented the front of "returning girls" by their manner (Goffman, 1959) of confidence and perfection. On the other hand, the manner of the "Laker fans" was thought to be that of inexperience and stupidity given their appearance of "purple and yellow dance stuff." The impression of confidence and perfection, not of an amateur groupie, is the ideal that dancers want to present when they are at auditions (Transcript 2, Lines 40-42, 60-61). The "returning girls" obviously gave off this impression if a fellow dancer labeled them as such.

If a dancer's manner gives an unfavorable impression to other dancers like the "huge Lakers fans" did, than other dancers are more likely not to regard him/her as a threat. This is indicated by the narrator's derogatory comment of "...and I'm like 'OK?'" The fact that this phrase came after the narrator described the "huge Laker fans" as someone "who had no idea how to dance," and that it is punctuated by a question mark, indicates that the dancer is being sarcastic and insulting the "huge Laker fans." The question mark at the end of the phrase indicates the narrator's disbelief that the dancers were going to be good. A dancer at an audition wants the other dancers to regard him/her as a threat (Transcript 1, Lines 34-35), and therefore dancers strive for

a confident "appearance" through appropriate props such as attire, hair, and make up. The "huge Laker fans" that were wearing "purple and yellow dance stuff" did not give a convincing performance. It was obvious to the other dancers that the "huge Laker fans" were attempting misrepresentation (Goffman, 1959) by wearing "purple and yellow dance stuff" in an attempt to make it seem as if they were going to be good dancers.

Dancers who form impressions of their competition based on their appearances are able to see whether or not they fit in with the desired role or if they are sticking out "like a sore thumb" (Transcript 1, Lines 86). Looking at other dancers before dancing can ease a dancer's mind when he/she sees people that look out of place as indicated by the narrator's judgment of the "returning girls" and the "huge Laker fans who had no idea how to dance." Looking at appearances also lets a dancer know whom his/her competition is as indicated by "You could tell who the returning girls were." The dancer can then reconstruct his/her front if necessary to give off a more favorable impression than the other dancers once the audition begins.

**Intimidating.** The goal of many of the dancers at dance auditions is to intimidate the competition before the audition so badly that they will not dance well come the audition itself (Transcript 1, Lines 34-35; Transcript 5, Lines 82-85). During the warm-up period, dancers will do various tricks with their bodies and their attitudes to present a manner (Goffman, 1959) of superiority in an attempt to daunt the other dancers. If a dancer is not aware of these strategic secrets (Goffman, 1959) than he/she will become intimidated by the time the audition starts. This dancer reveals how dancers attempt an intimidating manner and how she maintains expressive control in order to maintain her front (Goffman, 1959):

. . . I don't want to focus on all of that negative energy and everyone thinking "oh she's doing the splits more than I am. She's going to be better than me. While I can do five turns so there! . . . Ya, I know at ballet auditions there's always this horrible energy and I always try and find someplace to escape the intimidation.

There's just always this energy of "Oh she's so good, I'm going to do horribly."  
(Transcript 6, Lines 84-86, 88-90)

"Negative energy" indicates a strategic secret that is being used by other dancers in order to give a good performance at the audition. One strategic secret is "oh she's doing the splits more than I am. She's going to be better than me." The dancer who is doing the splits is doing so to intimidate the other dancer and give the impression of superiority as indicated by "She's going to be better than me." By using strategic secrets of physical specialties such as the splits or "I can do five pirouettes," the dancer shows a manner of confidence and superiority and gives the performance of "She's going to be better than me."

The dancers' manners create the "horrible energy" at auditions because everyone is trying to scare everyone else as shown by thought of "Oh she's so good, I'm going to do so horribly." The manner of being "so good" creates the impression that the dancer is intimidating and better than the dancer that is noticing him/her. In order to do well at an audition and to maintain his/her front of confidence and skill, the dancer must maintain expressive control and not fall into the trap of the other dancers' strategic secrets. This is shown by the narrator's desire to "not focus on all of that negative energy." A dancer can maintain expressive control by going "someplace to escape the intimidation." This will allow the dancer to keep up his/her front as well as maintain his/her desired impression. Finding "someplace to escape the intimidation" will also create the impression that the dancer is confident and skilled because he/she is not convinced by the other dancers' performances of intimidation. Finding "someplace to escape" will also create the impression of intimidation to those who were trying to intimidate in the first place as it gives off the impression that the dancer is unaffected by their performance because he/she is confident and skilled.

**Showing off.** Dancers often show off their physical skills such as flexibility in an attempt to create the impression that he/she is a good dancer and will be the dancer

hired for the job. Although showing off is a way to make a good impression, if occurring during the warm up period it can form a negative impression in the other dancers' minds. When a dancer displays his/her strengths for all to see, it is taken as a contrived performance and a misrepresentation by the dancer (Goffman, 1959). Dancers do show off in the warm up in an attempt to make the impression of a good dancer, but those who do it overtly give the other dancers the impression of a contrived performance and those who are subtle about it give a real performance ( Goffman, 1959). The following narrative explains this distinction:

If they look around and throw their legs up in the air for everyone to see and be afraid [of] because "Oh watch out- I can throw my legs up in the air!" You can tell right away that those girls are not going to be good. You can tell right away who the snots and who the show-offs are and usually they're covering up. They don't have the training or technique or they think they're not as good so they have to cover it up. The ones that are really focusing on stretching and really taking care of their bodies and breathing, not just flexibility and getting their legs behind their ears. (Transcript 6, Lines 76-82)

Successful impression management occurs when the performance is perceived as to be real by the audience (Goffman, 1959). The impression of being a good dancer was thereby made through the real performance of "really focusing on stretching and really taking care of their bodies and breathing." "Stretching," "taking care of [one's] body," and "breathing" are elements of dramatic realization (Goffman, 1959) that a dancer uses to highlight his/her skill. Doing all of the above while remaining introverted and focused put together the front of a skilled dancer (Goffman, 1959). The dancer is convinced of his/her performance and therefore the performance is seen as "sincere" as indicated by the repeated use of the word "really."

On the other hand, an insincere and contrived performance is created if a dancer "look[s] around" before doing a stretch "for everyone to see" and think that

he/she is a good dancer. When a dancer "look[s] around" before doing a stretch, it becomes an attempt at misrepresentation because the dancer is trying to dupe the other dancers into thinking that he/she is skilled because he/she can "throw my leg into the air." Other dancers are not taken by the performer's tricks because they are the dancer's colleagues (Goffman, 1959). Recall that certain things that can be hidden from the audience cannot be hidden from a performer's colleagues since they share the same type of performance habits (Goffman, 1959). Thus the misrepresentation becomes an insincere, contrived performance. To the other dancers at the audition, this creates the impression that the dancer is just doing these things because he/she does not "have the technique or they don't have the training or they think they're not as good" and is not really a good dancer.

The dancer did not succeed at creating the desired impression because he/she was focusing on "just flexibility and getting their legs behind their ears." The rest of the front proved otherwise because it was not did not present the idealized characteristics of a good dancer such as focus or stretching the entire body. A negative impression of a "snot" or a "show off" was thereby created. In order to avoid that impression, a dancer needs not to overtly flash one or two of his/her skills, but rather focus on him/herself as an individual.

### **During the Audition**

Once the audition starts, a dancer must not fall out of the performance and maintain his/her front because "you're constantly on display and being looked at" (Transcript 2, Lines 105). The choreographer calls out all of the dancers onto the floor in order to learn the routine. The routine is taught and reviewed, and then the dancers are told to clear the dance floor. The choreographer then proceeds to call out small groups (usually of 5-10) of dancers out onto the floor to dance the routine. After doing the routine, the dancers leave the dance floor and the next group takes the stage. This

continues until all of the dancers have performed the routine. The choreographer takes notes the entire time, but only on the dancers that he/she notices.

The dancer may have been able to maintain a certain impression up to this point, but when the dancing starts is when the choreographers become certain of who they will hire. Thus it is important to maintain one's front and to give a convincing performance from the time the dancer begins to learn the routine to after she has had her shot of performing for the choreographers and is watching the other dancers. Some ways that dancers are able to make sure their fronts are noticed is by where they are dancing on the dance floor, focusing their attitudes, suppressing nervousness, dancing their best, and being able to remain unaffected if a mistake occurs.

**Finding a good spot.** Once the choreographer calls the dancers onto the dance floor, the scramble to find a good spot begins since the goal of auditions is to have the choreographer see how well a dancer dances. A dancer wants to find an area on the floor where he/she can see the choreographers as well as be seen by them (Transcript 1, Lines 92-95; Transcript 5, Lines 292-295). Being seen by the choreographers while learning the routine is important as it allow the choreographer to begin to notice the dancers front (Goffman, 1959) and hopefully the choreographer will continue to notice the dancer throughout the entire audition. Being near the front of the room also allows the dancer to strive for idealization (Goffman, 1959) in his/her performance since most of the other dancers will take notice of him/her due to his/her conspicuous place. A dancer had this to say about why being in a good spot at the audition is so important:

. . . usually if I'm in the back I don't do as well because I just let the intimidation take over and as soon as I get into the room I go right to the front because then I'm kind of forced- I HAVE to do good because everyone can see me. That helps me in a lot of ways. For one, the judges see me right away because I'm right in front of them. They'd have to try not to. Then it makes me realize that

I'm in front of all these people and they're looking at me like 'Oh, she's in the front. She better prove she can be there.' So I have to do it for them, for myself, for everyone. (Transcript 1, Lines 100-105)

In order for a dancer to continue to create a favorable impression once the audition begins, he/she needs to be in a place where others will see him/her so that the dancer can perform to the fullest extent and not "let the intimidation take over." It forces the dancer to adopt the manner of an exceptional dancer through his/her appearance since he/she has "to do good because everyone can see" (Goffman, 1959). Being near the front of the crowd also allows for idealization since the dancer has to "prove she can be there," and therefore must perform to the dancers' and choreographers' standards of exceptional dance ability.

Forcing the judges to see the dancer because he/she is "right in front of them" creates the impression that the dancer is ready and willing to dance however the choreographers want him/her to as well as the impression of a love for dance. This is also an idealized performance of a dancer who loves to dance and is willing to work which would be someone that would be easy for the choreographers to work with. Being "right in front of them" also exemplifies dramatic realization because the dancer will be able to highlight his/her performance with "confirmatory facts" such as dancing ability and character that might otherwise "remain obscure," especially if the dancer was in the back of the room (Goffman, 1959, p. 30).

**Focusing your attitude.** As previously noted, it is important for a dancer to maintain his/her front (Goffman, 1959). throughout the entire audition in order to make a favorable impression. It is therefore necessary for a dancer to keep reminding him/herself of what this front is. Also known as "mental pep talk," the dancer is constantly mentally reminding him/herself of the desired impression during the audition in order to maintain expressive control (Goffman, 1959) and present a sincere performance. This type of impression management tactic is important because it gives

the dancer an ideal to perform for. During the audition, the dancer is consistently psyching him/herself up for the performance and is reminding him/herself to keep up the front. Here is what one dancer does to focus his front during auditions:

. . . well the mindset I take into auditions is that ya know- they're looking for ME. The reason that they hold auditions is because they need dancers. So I could very well be the one they're looking for. So they need me. If you put it into that mindset, it's a little less intimidating. It puts you in a position of power. . . . I just figure that I already know how to dance, so I need to just show them that I can.  
(Emphasis added, Transcript 4, Lines 66-70, 79-80)

That is how dancers create their fronts, by telling themselves that "they're looking for ME" and they are the ideal for the role for hire. This leads to the manner, or "mindset," of "power" and confidence as indicated by the phrase "I already know how to dance, so I just need to show them that I can." The dancer is simply going to present the front of a skilled dancer at the audition. The dancer just needs to keep up the appearance of being able to dance and the manner of confidence. This helps maintain the "mindset," or manner. The manner is especially important to have and maintain while the dancer is dancing in a large group of people and when the choreographer breaks the dancers into smaller groups. The "mindset" of "I could very well be the one they are looking for" is what the dancer needs to have during the audition to create the impression upon the choreographers that particular dancer IS who they are looking for.

"So they need me" indicates maintenance of expressive control. In order for the dancer to maintain a front, he/she needs to have a reason to do so. Feeling needed will prevent the dancer from any unmeant gestures or performance disruptions (Goffman, 1959) because "it's a little less intimidating," and more uplifting for the dancer who will now want to perform his/her best at the audition. "It puts you in a position of power" shows that focusing one's attitude is a good maintenance of expressive control in helping the dancer to achieve the desired impression. "I already



know how to dance so I need to just show them that I can" indicates dramatic realization as the dancer is reminding himself that he must include these "otherwise. . . . unapparent and obscure" details during the audition (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). A dancer needs to "throw everything out" at the choreographer to make a good impression (Transcript 2, Lines 171-173). This means a dramatic realization of including all of a one's talents, whether it be pointed feet, a smile, or high kicks, in the audition performance.

**Suppressing nerves.** A dancer cannot be nervous if he/she wishes to give a sincere performance. The dancer does not want to have a nervous appearance since that displays unconfident manner (Goffman, 1959). Suppressing nervousness is a maintenance of expressive control (Goffman, 1959) since it helps to maintain the dancer's appearance and manner of skill and confidence as well as allows the dancer to strive for the idealized performer that the choreographer wants to hire. This dancer shares her strategic secret of how she maintains expressive control to keep up her front and get over being nervous (Goffman, 1959):

Well, I get nervous as we learn the combination. . . . I think you have to be totally confident. Like 'I'm going to go out there and [am] gonna be so much better than everyone else.' You have to have that mentality. You do. . . . You can't be nervous. I do get nervous as I'm learning the routine and I concentrate hard then, but you just have to get over being nervous. . . . You just train yourself to get over it, you know what I mean? Now it's time to go do your thing.

(Transcript 2, Lines 94, 95-96, 98-100, 102-103)

Not being nervous is essential to making a positive impression at the audition. To do this, a dancer must not even think about being nervous, but think about being confident and doing well. Having "that mentality" and "training yourself to get over it" indicate this dancer's strategic secret of suppressing nervousness while at auditions. "[T]hat mentality also indicates a maintenance of expressive control. A dancer is able to

maintain expressive control by thinking about the ideal. The dancer must think about the idealized "totally confident" dancer who is "so much better than everyone else" and work towards that so that he/she will not think about being nervous.

The phrase "have to get over being nervous" also indicates a maintenance of expressive control. The appearance of nervousness is incongruent with the manner of confidence that dancers wish to have at auditions and would therefore damage the dancer's front and the performance would be seen as contrived and false. "[T]hat mentality" helps maintain the dancer's manner of confidence and reassures him/her of giving a sincere performance. It is therefore important for dancers to hide the fact that they are nervous at an audition. They need to replace it with an air of confidence in order to make a favorable impression during the audition. Dancers also need to suppress nervousness to maintain expressive control of their performance for the other dancers who, since the warm up period, have been trying to intimidate the dancer.

**Dancing your heart out.** A dancer wants to dance his/her best so that the choreographers will notice him/her. To give the impression of talent, dancers do a number of things to enhance the routine taught at the audition. Each dancer has his/her own ideas of what will spice up the routine and showcase the dancer's talents, enhancing his/her appearance for the choreographers (Goffman, 1959). Dancing one's best, especially once the dancers are broken into smaller groups, is an important part of "dramatic realization", since otherwise hidden details are revealed (Goffman, 1959). The following is one dancer's plan for dancing her best at an audition:

. . . regardless of what the steps may be, because it may be something totally hard for me, think that it's just really cake and all I have to do is perform it, like spice it up or something. I just always have it in the back of my mind to make sure my face is working and I'm smiling and just having the performance come through my face even though my steps may be completely off. Then they'll remember me. (Transcript 3, Lines 113-117)

"Spice it up," "face working," "smiling," and "having the performance come through my face" all create the appearance of an exceptional dancer who will perform the desired role well. The dancer gestures like the above to create his/her appearance while dancing and to convey a manner of skill (Goffman, 1959). "Then they'll remember me" indicates a manner of excellence. This is the manner of the role for hire and the dancer's goal is to be remembered for this manner. Although it "may be something totally hard" for the dancer, he/she must maintain the front while dancing. Thinking that "it's really cake," or pretending the dance steps are easy, helps to maintain expressive control during the performance and allows the dancer to continue to make a favorable impression as well as does "having the performance come through" since there is a chance the dancer could have "the steps completely off."

"Spice it up," "face working," "smiling," and "having the performance come through my face" also indicate dramatic realization. The dancer is choosing to infuse his/her performance with things, such as gestures, that help to make the performance seem sincere and real to the audience. The dancer wants the choreographer to see that he/she is capable of performing and therefore makes sure to include certain performance qualities like the above when dancing the standard audition routine. This dramatic realization is planned in the dancer's back region (Goffman, 1959) as indicated when the dancer says "in the back of my mind." In order for the performance to be successful and the desired impression to be given, the dancer must, in the back region, plan a dramatic realization of all his/her performance talents.

**Covering up mistakes.** A dancer's worst nightmare is making a mistake during the audition. Not only will this destroy the performer's front (Goffman, 1959), but it will negate the impression that the dancer worked so hard to create. The dancer must disregard this unmeant gesture and continue on with the performance (Goffman, 1959). A dancer must have protective practices prepared and ready for use in order to save

his/her performance and keep up the desired front (Goffman, 1959). This is one dancer's protective practice for mistakes at auditions:

Ya, I've messed up. I'll step on the wrong foot or I'll turn the wrong way. Once I realize it, it's probably too late anyway, but I'll just probably look at the girl next to me and see where they are and pick up from there. I won't make a big deal out of it, probably just pretend that I meant to do it or something. And definitely not make a big deal out of it, just pretend like it didn't happen and keep on going.

I try to not even let my eyes flinch or anything. (Transcript 3, Lines 126-131)

If a dancer performs an unmeant gesture like "step[ping] on the wrong foot" or "turn[ing] the wrong way," the dancer must immediately "pick up from there" so that his/her front will not be destroyed. The dancer must "not make a big deal out of it" and act as if nothing out of the ordinary happened so that he/she can continue to create the desired impression (Transcript 3, Lines 129-130; Transcript 1, Lines 128-129).

"[I]t's probably too late" signals the beginning of the performance disruption and the need for the dancer to engage in protective practices to save the performance. When the dancer "realize[s] it," the protective practices begin. The most important protective practice is to "not make a big deal out of it," "just pretend like it didn't happen," and "keep on going." If a dancer does not first do that, then his/her appearance and manner will change and be inconsistent with the collective appearance and manner that fellow dancers have which is that of being a skilled and confident dancer. Not "mak[ing] a big deal out it," pretending "like it didn't happen," and continuing on with the routine helps the dancer to remain in competition with the other dancers since his/her front will remain unaffected.

Another protective practice is to "look at the girl next to" the dancer and "see where they are and pick it up from there." A glance to the nearest dancer helps to maintain the dancer's front because his/her appearance is that of someone still dancing and manner is still one of complete performance. Sneaking a look at someone else

allows the dancer to maintain expressive control (Goffman, 1959) by not stopping in the middle of performing the dance routine. Not letting one's "eyes flinch or anything" saves the dancer's appearance. If the dancer's appearance does not change, then the choreographer may not even notice that the dancer made a mistake. Not adjusting one's appearance is a maintenance of expressive control since it allows the dancer to make sure that the unmeant gesture does not convey a negative not ideally any impression.

If the performer acts as if he/she "meant to do it or something," then the performance will also be saved. This means that the unmeant gesture would actually become part of the performance. If the dancer incorporates the unmeant gesture into the performance, the dancer does not let down his/her appearance or manner. In fact, this may be beneficial to the dancer by making the performance unique from that of the other dancers.

### **Playing Up to the Choreographers**

Although executing a sincere, real performance happens during the audition. There are also a number of impression management techniques that dancers use just for the choreographers. One important aspect of impression management of dancers at dance auditions is creating a favorable impression upon the choreographers since it is the choreographers who choose the dancers for the roles. The choreographer is the audience that the dancer wants to impress once the audition begins. It is important to always maintain a favorable front and impress it upon the choreographer because "that's the one that they'll pick, the one that their eyes go to" (Transcript 1, Lines 94-95). The dancer uses impression management to when playing up to, or brown nosing, the choreographers. It is important to for a dancer to really get in good with the choreographer and make him/herself known to the choreographer at the audition because the choreographer is the person who is going to hire the dancer. There are many ways a dancer uses impression management just on the choreographers. These

include standing out as an individual, entertaining the choreographer, making eye contact, and communicating intelligently.

**Being unique to be noticed.** Although a dancer has tried to become the desired role before the audition, he/she may not always be what the choreographer really wants because dancer does not catch the choreographer's attention during the audition. Experienced auditioners know that there is always a certain appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959) that the choreographers expect those who fulfill the desired role to have at the actual audition; however, many people at the audition may already have the appearance and manner to fulfill the role. The dancer must catch the choreographer's eye. This happens when the choreographer notices something outstanding about the performer's front (Goffman, 1959). Although the dancers may break up into small groups, the choreographers still do not look closely at everyone. So not only must a dancer be entertaining to be hired, but he/she must be unique. All dancers can be entertaining; therefore, the dancer must be unique for the choreographer's attention to be kept on him/her.

Dancers at auditions realize the importance of dramatic realization (Goffman, 1959) and they use it when highlighting unique things about themselves as individuals. This makes for a unique appearance and the manner of a real person, not just a carbon copy of a jazz or ballet dancer. The dancer hopes that being unique in some way give the choreographer the impression of a real performance (Goffman, 1959) and the dancer will get the job (Goffman, 1959). This dancer recalls how a dancer at an audition gave the choreographer the impression of a real performance through her individuality:

. . . let them [the choreographers] see a glimpse of you not as a dancer, but see that you have a personality and in some small way other than you being totally obnoxious and out of control. There's a girl that I see at every single audition and in some way, shape, or form, she makes it a point to get the choreographer

to notice her whether it be obnoxiously or whatever. And she always makes the cut the first time, always. And she's not that good of a dancer. So I learned from her and so I always try to make that [getting the choreographer's attention] a point as well. Just let them see a glimpse of your personality. (Transcript 2, Lines 168-173).

To make a connection with the choreographer, a dancer must "have a personality" in addition to being able to know how to dance. If a choreographer sees the not only the front of the role desired, but a "glimpse" of a dancer's individual manner that impresses him or her, then the dancer will be hired. A dancer can use dramatic realization as indicated by the phrase "in some way, shape, or form" to highlight the unique part of him/her that is "not a dancer." "[M]asks it a point" is when dramatic realization is used, for the dancer is highlighting facts about his/her performance such as "a personality" that would otherwise go unnoticed as indicated by the phrase "in some small way." A dancer must use dramatic realization to make a good impression upon the choreographers because all of the other dancers are going to have a similar appearance and manner since they are all have prepared their fronts for the same role. It is the dancer that infuses his/her front with "a glimpse of [their] personality" that will give the desired impression of being the dancer for the role since the performance will seem real.

The fact that the dancer in the above passage "always makes the cut the first time" indicates a real performance. The audience, or choreographer, is taken by the performance and the dancer's desired impression has been imprinted. The dancer has given an idealized (Goffman, 1959) performance. Even though the performer may not even be "that good of a dancer," he/she will still get hired through a real performance. Getting "the choreographer to notice" the dancer means that the dancer must give a real performance through a convincing front. If a dancer "get[s] the choreographer to notice" who he or she is, then the chance of the dancer getting the

job is high. If the choreographer takes notice of the dancer, then the dancer will have the full chance to make the desired impression upon the choreographer.

To make a good impression upon the choreographer, the dancer must grab the choreographer's attention. It is one thing to fulfill the qualifications of the role but, as exemplified by the "girl" in the above passage, it is the "glimpse of your personality" that makes for a convincing performance. In a swarm of dancers, it can be easy to become lost and unnoticeable. "It's difficult to be seen," admits one dancer (Transcript 5, Line 291). That is why it is important for dancers to make a lasting impression on the choreographer during the time they are out on the dance floor. If a dancer infuses the role for hire with something unique, then the choreographer will take notice since the dancer is different from his/her colleagues. This will lead to an interest in the dancer's performance and, most likely, a job for the dancer.

**Entertaining the choreographer.** Once a dancer has caught the choreographer's attention, he/she must keep it. A unique front creates a favorable impression because it does not just capture, but holds the choreographer's attention. The ideal dancer must keep the choreographer interested in his/her front by entertaining him/her (Transcript 1, Lines 94-97). Although the dancer may have prepared for the role as previously discussed, the choreographer may not have gotten the dancer's intended impression because he/she is not entertained by the dancer. Through dramatic realization (Goffman, 1959), a dancer can offer an idealized performance by entertaining the choreographer. This could get him/her the job. Here is one dancer's explanation of the type of dancer who always entertains the choreographer:

... they definitely had that extra "oommph." There are plenty of good dancers, but they have to want to work with the choreographers. The choreographers have to know that when you go out onstage and perform their steps that you'll enjoy it and it will look enjoyable, not technically good. Theatrics and enjoyment



[are] so important in an audition. Someone can be such a good dancer but if it's not in their face, you won't hire. . . . [they] see someone who is half as good next to them and they're going to smile and entertain. (Transcript 6, Lines 120-125, 125-127)

"[T]hat extra 'oomph'" is the ideal standard that the choreographer looks for. If the dancer's appearance is one of "theatrics" and the manner one of "enjoyment," then he/she will be hired. To do this, the dancer must "overshine" the other dancers with his/her appearance and manner. The dancer must offer an idealized performance to fit the choreographer's ideal of the role for hire. The phrases "have to want to work with the choreographers," "oomph," "look enjoyable, not just technically good," "smile," and "entertain the audience" is the front that the choreographer is looking for and these are people who the choreographer will hire. The dancer whose front demonstrates these things will "overshine[s]" because he/she is engaging in idealization. The dancer is going to "get the job" because he/she offered the most real, sincere performance as indicated by the term "overshine." The choreographer wants a dancer who will "entertain the audience" through an idealized performance.

The appearance of being a good dancer will not get a dancer hired since a dancer "who is half as good" as the others may be the one that is hired. It is the appearance of being able to the steps and the manner of enjoyment, the narrative reveals that will get a dancer the job. The manner of enjoyment is indicated by "smile" and "entertain." The fact that there are "plenty of good dancers out there" places an emphasis on the need for a dancer to engage in dramatic realization to foster a favorable impression. Dancers who are hired use dramatic realization when presenting their front before the choreographer so that they highlight details about their front that may normally go unnoticed. "Smile," "[t]heatrics and enjoyment and expression" are examples of dramatic realization since they highlight unique details about the dancer that create a convincing performance.

The dancers that the choreographers want are ones who can keep the audience's attention while performing the steps. Those are the dancers that "overshine" the others and get hired. To be the dancer who gets hired, at the audition he/she must have the appearance and manner of a dancer who looks like he/she is having fun and is expressive of the role for hire. The manner is "in their face." The choreographers hire dancers who have expression "in their face" because they are able to "entertain" an audience.

**Eye contact.** Another way that dancers try to play up to the choreographers is through eye contact. Dancers make eye contact to give the choreographer the impression that they are interested in the role for hire and interested in performing for the choreographer him/herself. It shows that the dancer is making the extra effort to get the part (Transcript 3; Lines 158-159). Eye contact also makes the performance more real rather than contrived (Goffman, 1959) since the dancer is trying to perform for a specific audience, the choreographer, rather than simply going through the motions of the routine. This dancer explains how eye contact is an important part of playing up to the choreographer at an audition:

. . . eye contact is so important. I need to target a certain choreographer and perform straight to him the entire time I'm out there so they know that I'm not just watching the door, but trying to make a connection to them. This way they'll know I want the job. . . . [some] think that dancing alone will get their attention but it won't. They have to know you want it. (Transcript 3, Lines 156-159, 159-160)

"[E]ye contact" is used by the performer can use to indicate his/her interest in the role. This is dramatic realization (Goffman, 1959) because the fact the dancer wants the role would not otherwise be known. Eye contact makes the fact the dancer wants the job apparent to the choreographer as shown when the narrator says, "This way they'll know I want the job." The choreographer will be more likely to hire a dancer that

wants the job. "[D]ancing alone" will not do this and does not present a real performance since it "won't" get the choreographer's attention.

Eye contact gives the choreographer the impression of a sincere performance by allowing the dancer "to make a connection to" the choreographer. This connection with the choreographer is important because it enables the dancer to present his/her front (Goffman, 1959) and make the desired impression upon the choreographer. The dancer's "appearance" will indicate that the dancer is "not just watching the door," but is interested in the role and the dancer's manner will be one of sincere desire for the part (Goffman, 1959). The fact that "eye contact is so important" means that locking eyes with the choreographer at the audition is a idealized performance since it proves to the choreographer that the dancer wants the role.

**Asking intelligent questions.** Another way for a dancer to use impression management to play up to the choreographers is by asking questions. This gives the dancer the chance to be singled out and noticed by the choreographer amidst the sea of dancers. If phrased intelligently and spoken with authenticity, it can also give the choreographer the impression that the dancer is skilled and is interested in doing a good job when performing the role (Transcript 3, Lines 194-197; Transcript 6, Lines 157-159). Thus, good questions can give a dancer an edge with the choreographers who will then remember the dancer for the rest of the audition. The following account reveals why one dancer makes sure to ask questions at auditions:

... I try to ask questions. If I don't know a step, if I don't remember what count 5 was, I'll ask because that means to the choreographers that I'm paying attention and trying to do the steps rather than just trying let it slide and fake it later. And they'll know that you'll ask them in rehearsal to make sure the steps are clarified and they care about doing it right. I think to choreographers, that makes a really good impression. But you have to ask smart questions. (Transcript 6, Line 159)

This passage indicates choreographers like dancers who are eager to dance and care about the role they are performing. If a dancer wants to give the choreographer the impression that he/she has a good work and performance ethic and will not be a problem to work with in rehearsals, then the dancer will be sure to ask questions at the auditions. A choreographer will hire a dancer that will be no trouble to work with (Transcript 6, Lines 208-210). Therefore, asking "smart questions" makes "a really good impression" upon the choreographers and the dancer will continue to be noticed for the remainder of the audition since he/she is "really paying attention."

The manner (Goffman, 1959) that the dancer is attempting to create is revealed when she says "that means to the choreographers that I'm paying attention and trying to do the steps." The question highlights the dancer and indicates the appearance of "paying attention" (Goffman, 1959). If a dancer asks a question about a step, then it is evident that the dancer is focused on the routine and on performing well. It indicates a manner of care and makes the choreographer think that if hired, the dancer will "make sure the steps are clarified" and "care about doing it right." "Smart questions" are impressive to the choreographer as well, for they indicate a manner of dedication to dance and performance.

Asking questions is also a way to maintain expressive control (Goffman, 1959) so that the dancer is clear of the audition routine and will not "fake it later" when it comes time to perform in smaller groups. Having the "steps clarified" will guard against unmeant gestures later in the performance.

### **After All of the Dancing is Done**

Once a dancer's smaller group has danced the routine, the dancer will not dance again. However, this does not mean that the audition is over and the dancer may step out of his/her front. The dancer is still in the "front region" and therefore must continue to create and maintain the intended impression for the audience (Goffman, 1959). Impression management is still being used while the dancer is waiting for the others to

dance, interacting with other dancers, and while the choreographers announce who has been hired and who had been cut.

**On the sidelines.** It is important for a dancer to maintain the front even after his or her small group has danced because the dancer "always wants to look [his/her] best" (Transcript 3, Lines 39-40). Even after the dancer has danced, he/she is still in the front region because the audience, the choreographer, is still present within the setting (Goffman, 1959). The choreographer may happen to glance at the side of the room and if he/she sees a dancer step out of the front, the dancer is doomed not to be hired. When asked if she was still "auditioning" on the sidelines<sup>5</sup> after she danced, one dancer had this to say:

Ya, definitely. The entire time. You're constantly on display and being looked at so you don't want to be caught in the corner picking your nose. . . . And so then you have to find it within yourself and be like, "This is still a good opportunity for them to see me. (Transcript 2, Lines 105-106, 122-123)

Choreographers want to hire dancers that will give them a full performance all of the time (Transcript 6, Lines 154-156). A dancer who steps out of character after doing the audition routine will probably step out of character during rehearsals for the choreographer's show. If a dancer wants to secure a favorable impression upon the choreographer, then the dancer must remain in character for the entire audition. The dancer must maintain expressive control so as to not "be caught in the corner picking your nose." "Caught" indicates an unmeant gesture which will destroy the performer's front (Goffman, 1959). When a dancer is "caught" in an unmeant gesture, the performance is ruined. The performer may think that just because he/she is done dancing that the dancer automatically moves into the back region. In reality the dancer is "constantly on display." "[O]n display" indicates that the dancer is in the front region. "[B]eing looked at" indicates the performance that the performer, the dancer, is giving to

the audience, the choreographer. "[T]he entire time" acknowledges the audition as the front region and a performance.

"This is still a good opportunity to see me" is used to indicate that the dancer is trying to maintain expressive control by encouraging herself to keep up her appearance and manner. Indeed, the choreographer could be watching her at that exact moment. If a dancer is to let down his/her front at any time, then the front that had been so carefully constructed will be destroyed and the desired impression unconvincing. It is to the dancer's advantage to keep up the front even after dancing.

**Now we're friends, but I'm still better: A change in interaction.** Recall that before the audition gets started, there is usually minimal interaction among the dancers. As the audition progresses, the dancers begin to act more like teammates even though they are still colleagues (Goffman, 1959). Each dancer is still maintaining his/her individual front, but is more willing to interact with the other dancers after the dancer has taken his/her turn to dance. This means that the dancer is confident in the front and in the performance he/she is giving and is able to maintain expressive control of the performance (Goffman, 1959). The dancer's appearance and manner of skill and confidence has been sincere. The dancers that have taken their turns performing in smaller groups retreat back to their colleagues on the sideline to wait until all the other dancers have finished. Interaction can now happen among the dancers because the impression management techniques are free secrets (Goffman, 1959) that can be revealed without damaging the performer's performance. When asked if dancers tended to interact with one another more towards the end of the audition, the dancer replied:

I think people do. I think at the very beginning people are paralyzed with fear and anticipation and as they get rolling and as certain people feel as if they're really connected and they're hot, they're kickin' ass, then things loosen up a little

bit. I think at the beginning, initially everybody's just trying to size each other up.

(Transcript 5, Lines 90-94)

The fact that the dancers "loosen up" only a "little bit" indicates that they are still in the front region (Goffman, 1959). The dancer is still engaged in impression management and in maintaining the front since he/she "feels as if they're really connected and they're hot, and they're kickin' ass" and is only able to "loosen up a little bit." "[L]oosen up a little bit" also indicates that the dancer have not become teammates and are still colleagues and therefore still actively practicing impression management since they are not on the same team.

However, all of the dancers at the audition know that the other dancers are trying to impress the choreographers with their appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, interacting with one another at this point will not harm the performer because the dancer has already had his/her moment in front of the audience, hence the idea that impression management towards the choreographers is a free secret (Goffman, 1959) among the dancers. This is shown when the narrator reveals that "at the very beginning" of the audition "everybody's just trying to size each other up," but then "get rolling" and "feeling really connected and they're hot, and they're kickin' ass." The fact that the dancers "size each other up" at the beginning of the performance means that the making a good impression upon the choreographer is a free secret. The fact that dancers know this about one another will not hurt their performance as shown by the phrase "loosen up a little bit" and increased interaction.

The narrative also shows how the dancer must still maintain a front even when the time draws near to the end of the audition when the dancing is almost completed. The dancers are just more confident with his/her appearance and manner since they are no longer "paralyzed with fear," but "hot" and "kickin' ass." The fact that the dancer must constantly maintain the front is indicated by the term "rolling." If the dancer

maintains the front throughout the entire audition, than the dancer will be "rolling" and sincerely convinced of the front enough that he/she can interact with other dancers.

**And after of all of that. . . . you get cut!** Unfortunately, a dancer will more often than not be cut by the end of the audition since only a "select number" (Transcript 4, Line 93) are chosen for a particular role and the other 90 percent cannot be used (Transcript 2, Line 135). The cutting is usually done with all dancers present and in a public way since the choreographer will shout out the numbers of the dancers he/she wants (Transcript 6, Lines 101-103 ; Nielson, 1984). Just because cuts are being made, it does not mean that the audition is over. The audition is in fact not over and the dancer still needs to maintain the front no matter if he/she is selected or not. The dancer is giving a performance for as long as the dancer remains in the front region, the audition location (Goffman, 1959; Nielson, 1984). The choreographer still notices a cut dancer's appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959), and this could make a difference in hi/her opinion of the dancer at the choreographer's next audition. Being cut renders a set of impression management techniques in order to mask one's disappointment and maintain expressive control of the front (Goffman, 1959). Here is how one dancer handles being cut:

I just figure I am not what they were looking for. You just leave graciously and know that's the name of the game. You go into an audition with the possibility you might get a job and be noticed or you might get cut. You might just be too short, you might not have the right color hair, you might just not be in that right place at the moment of physicality. They might be looking for somebody who can do forty seven turns and land on their head and that's not where your body is at. Or they might be looking for exactly what you are. Just realize it's up to them. All you can do is just be who you are and keep a sense that the audition is not the be all and end all of your career. (Transcript 5, Lines 196-204).



A dancer may have not given a convincing performance (Goffman, 1959) as indicated by "I just figure I am not what they are looking for." To the audience, the choreographer, the dancer's front may have been "too short," "not the right color hair," or "not in that right place" in terms of dance style and ability, even though the dancer engaged in idealization during the performance (Goffman, 1959). The sentence "You go into an audition with the possibility you might get a job or you might get cut" reveals the need for the dancer to keep up the front throughout the entire audition, since it is not certain whether or not the choreographer will cut him or her. The dancer needs to keep up the appearance and manner because the dancer "might get the job." "[I]t's up to them" reinforces the idea of performing to an audience and highlights the fact that the entire audition is a performance attempting to convince the choreographer that one's front is the ideal one and is sincere.

Although it feels horrible to be cut (Transcript 6, Line 190-192), the dancer is still in the front region and in order to pull off a real and sincere performance, must maintain the same front he/she started with. The narrator's thought of "You go into the audition with the possibility you might get a job and be noticed or the possibility you might get cut" indicates that the dancer means that if cut, the dancer should maintain the front by exiting the front region "graciously" so as not to make a performance disruption (Goffman, 1959). "[L]eave graciously" and "keep a sense that any audition is not the be all and end all of your career" indicate a maintenance of expressive control (Goffman, 1959). By engaging in these things, the dancer is able to keep up the appearance and manner of being an able and confident dancer. The choreographer will recognize this and maybe at the next audition the dancer will be what the choreographer is looking for, since he/she will already have a sense of what the dancer can do (Transcript 2, Line 123).

Maintaining one's front and performing is especially important when the dancer is cut. If the dancer shows any sign of disappointment, then a misrepresentation will

occur and the choreographer will be made aware of the fact that the dancer was giving a contrived, false performance (Goffman, 1959). Once in the back region (Goffman, 1959) and out of sight of the audience, or choreographer, the dancer can express disappointment. Until then the dancer needs to keep the performance consistent and have an appearance of "leav[ing gracefully]" and a manner of "any audition is not the be all and end all of your career."

### **Discussion**

Through interview and analysis, it was found that impression management plays a large part in how a dancer acts at a dance audition. Dancers engage in idealization before they are even at the audition, for they construct their fronts in such a way as to offer the impression that they think will create a convincing performance when presented to the choreographer (Goffman, 1959). Once they have arrived at the audition, the dancers begin to perform their preconstructed fronts and test them out on one another. Dramatic realization and maintenance of expressive control (Goffman, 1959) are used to maintain the appearance and manner in the presence of other dancers who are testing their fronts as well. Once the audition actually begins, the dancer performs the front and highlights his/her strong points for the choreographer using dramatic realization. Impression management is used towards the choreographer in hopes that he/she will notice the dancer and see him/her as a potential candidate for the role. Impression management is still used even after the dancer has taken his/her turn dancing because there is a chance that the audience will notice him/her.

Erving Goffman's theory of impression management applied to the context of dance auditions is unique in the fact that it reveals a communication phenomenon that occurs both overtly and covertly, both pre-planned and spontaneously. This thesis adds to the study of impression management in its discovery of the regular use of impression management by a previously unresearched group, dancers at dance

auditions. It also informs both dancers and choreographers of the dancer's manipulation of him/herself at auditions in order to be hired for a job. Dancers can learn what works and what does not work when attempting to impress choreographers at auditions, as well as how to impress the other dancers at the auditions. Dancers can learn to prevent unmeant gestures that tarnish their impressions from happening and learn how to cover up their insecurities, mistakes, and disappointments that they may feel during auditions. Choreographers can also be made aware of to what extent the dancers go to impress them, and hopefully take that into consideration when choosing dancers instead of simply type-casting. Furthermore, from this research dancers can also learn how to interact with one another at the auditions.

Although this study did add to the knowledge of the applications of impression management theory, it does have its limitations and further research is needed on the subject in order to have a complete understanding of the impression management that dancers use at auditions. One limitation to this study is that the majority of the subjects interviewed were female. If a larger sample of males were studied, the data may have revealed other impression management techniques. Future studies could be designed for male dancer impression management at dance auditions and female dancer impression management at dance auditions. The results of this potential study would also have implications for studies in the field of gender communication.

The results of this study come from dancers who are involved in dance both academically and professionally. During the interviews, a number of the subjects noted that there was a big difference between the two areas (Transcript 4, Lines 39-50; Transcript 5, Lines 227-281; Transcript 6, Lines 278-287). These dancers had school and parental support to fall back on if they were not hired. If dancing is one's only job, the impression management techniques used and the feelings about the audition process may be radically different. A future study could be designed to receive data

from both those dancers who have something else to fall back on and those dancers for whom dancing is their sole source of income and support.

Another limitation of this study is that the data is only from a dancer's, not a choreographer's point of view. Obtaining data from a choreographer's point of view on what impression management techniques he/she uses on dancers at auditions would further the study of impression management and dance auditions as well. It would also benefit dancers because they would know whether or not their impression management techniques were working. The choreographer's side of the audition process is an important one since it is for him whom the dancers are auditioning. A study could be designed to focus on just the choreographer's side of the audition process.

Overall, this thesis was informative as it shed light onto a subject that is hardly researched. The study was able to show the many ways in which dancers utilized impression management theory during dance auditions. It was fascinating to be able to connect the two subjects since so little is known about dance and communication. As a dancer, I found the research and analysis process to be interesting and informative. What I discovered through this research will be beneficial to me the next time I audition.

## Appendix A

### Sample Interview Questions

1. How long have you been attending dance auditions?
2. For what genres of dance have you auditioned for?
3. Is there a difference in:
  - a. attire
  - b. interaction
  - c. environmentbetween the different dance genres?
5. What do you do to prepare for an audition?
6. Do you research the company or role before going to the audition?
7. What do you bring with you to the audition?
8. What do you usually wear?
9. What do the other dancers at the audition usually wear?
10. Do you do your hair and make up?
11. Do the other dancers at the audition do their hair and make up?
12. How can you tell if a dancer looks as if he/she will be good once the audition starts?
13. Is there competition at auditions? Describe the feeling.
14. What type and level of interaction is there among the dancers at the audition? Is it the same from beginning to end?
15. What type and level of interaction is there between the choreographers and dancers at auditions? Is it the same from beginning to end?
16. What do you do to make a good impression upon the choreographers?
17. What do the choreographers look for in dancers at the auditions?
18. Do you get nervous? If so, how do you deal with your nervousness?
19. Do you feel as if you are giving a performance at the audition?

20. Describe a dancer whom you felt stuck out at an audition.
21. What do you do when it is not your turn to dance in small groups? How do you spend your time?
22. What happens if you make a mistake?
23. What do you do if you cannot pick up the combination?
24. What do you do if you get cut at the audition?
25. What do you do after the entire audition is over?

## Appendix B

### Letter to Subjects

November 29, 1999

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As I finish writing my senior thesis, I would just like to take the time to thank you for volunteering your time to be interviewed. The knowledge that you shared was very interesting and of great value. I utilized much of what you said in making connections between experience and theory. Your information was very useful to my area of study and was essential to its completion. The final copy of my thesis is due Thursday, December 2nd, and you are more than welcome to call me at 310-645-3759 with any questions or if you would like to read the finished product. Thank you again for sharing your time and your experiences.

Happy Holidays,

## Appendix C

### Examples of Dance Audition Calls

- **M/F PROFESSIONAL DANCERS** - seeking male and female dancers for May 1 performance at Clark Studio Theater, including work presented at Jacob's Pillow 65th anniversary season. Strong ballet and modern technique, partnering skills, maturity, discipline. Possible pay. Auditions will be held Sat Jan 23, Sun 24 from 1-3PM at Keystone, 252 W. 30th St. 2nd floor, NYC. Call Claudia Stoltman at 914-478-4771 for appointment.
- **DANCERS WHO SING** - Seeking Asian-type female dancers who sing and entertain for tropical band. Shows in the tri-state area. Paid performances. For appt. call 718-768-6182.
- **MALES CONTEMP. DANCE THR. NY** - Casting experienced professional male dancers who act, with strong ballet technique as well as jazz and/or modern background for paid rehearsals and performances at Lincoln Center this spring, and pending European tour. Call for appt. 212-539-3528 Jennifer Kries A.D.
- **REVUE, FANTASTIQUE** - Vegas style revue playing at the SandCastle in tropical Micronesia, seeks male dancers 5'8 plus, female dancers 5'6 plus, for immediate openings. Competitive salary, round-trip airfare, and housing provided. Send video (with high kicks) and resume ASAR to Scott Rogers, SandCastle Ent., 1199 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon, Guam 96911. Phone 672-649-7263, ext 205.

Audition calls were taken from New York City Dance Page at <http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/Balcony/6640/>.



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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>A person who makes up dances.

<sup>2</sup>Dancing "full out" means to dance to the best of one's technical ability and with the most expression and energy one is able to offer. Dancing full out is giving 100 percent.

<sup>3</sup>A "technique class" is a general term for a ballet, modern, jazz, or tap class. In a technique class, the dancer trains his/her body and learns how to do dance steps.

<sup>4</sup>A "Laker Girl" is a dancer/cheerleader for the Los Angeles Lakers, a professional basketball team.

<sup>5</sup>"Side line" refers to the area along the walls of the audition room.